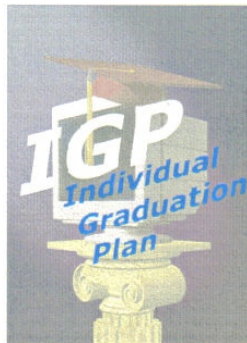


A Perspective on Individual Graduation Plans

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Frankfort, Kentucky
September 2004

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The Law

Section 2 of 704 KAR states that "beginning with the graduation class of 2002, each student in common school shall complete an individual graduation plan which incorporates emphasis on career development, and shall have a total of 22 credits for high school graduation."

The enactment of this law left many Kentucky high schools searching and struggling for an efficient and effective mode for their students to use in fulfilling this Individual Graduation Plan obligation. In the rush to produce the IGP, many of the underlying principles and purposes of the IGP were lost. It became more about the product and less about the process of examining self-interest and aptitudes, setting goals and laying down a plan that leads to that goal. It is this learning process that will serve the students long after they have left high school.

The IGP

The IGP is not only a product, but also a concentrated effort to explore career opportunities that are available and to examine the type of training and aptitudes necessary for the selected career path. With career exploration and careful completion of the IGP folder, students should be well on their way to making insightful and purposeful decisions about their career goals. The IGP itself is designed to contain student assessments that reflect their abilities, personal interests, and both academic strengths and weaknesses. It should state the student's career goals and intended postsecondary training, contain a comprehensive four-year high school plan that supports career goals, and include any other information that will assist the student in preparing a résumé. It is recommended that the IGP process will begin as early as 6th grade, but definitely by grade 8.

Modes of Implementation

In the scramble to adhere to the law, schools embarked on a variety of paths to accomplish the task of completing the IGP. While many schools found a successful route, some did not. Among some of the tried and true methods are –

- Advisor/Advisee Program,
- Integration with a required class or homeroom, and
- Creation of a new required career course.

Any of the above methods will accomplish the goal; however, the key element with any of them is the planning. The planning must be done thoughtfully, carefully and thoroughly. Schools rushing into any of these generally found their program failed and left the entire staff with distaste for the program. In the next

section, I will discuss each of the methods mentioned above with specific attention given to the planning and implementation process.

Advisor/Advisee Program

Advisor/Advisee programs have been around for quite some time and are successful in fulfilling many needs of both students and teachers. When the IGP made its entrance, those schools with sound Advisor/Advisee programs quickly embraced it and incorporated it into their program with ease. Establishing an Advisor/Advisee program does take a fair amount of time to plan and implement, but is an excellent mode in which to engage students with the IGP. As with any method, the goal setting, planning, implementation, and follow-up are key components to the success of your program. The *IGP and Advisory Program* document, found on the Kentucky Department of Education web page (www.education.ky.gov) will assist in identifying some suggested topics for various grade levels. However, it is important to remember that topics must relate to your schools' and students' needs.

Goal Setting

Obviously before you can begin working on a program, your goal(s) need to be clearly defined. Ask yourself:

- What do we want to accomplish?
- What do we need to accomplish?

Many schools have successful Advisor/Advisee programs and, if you ask them, you will find that they have similar goals, but also just as many different ones. Their goals are different because they have different needs, populations and environments. Many schools use the Advisor/Advisee program as a means to cover core content that is related to career development and, in some cases, other academic areas.

The most important factor in beginning your program is to clearly define what you want the program to do for your students and staff. It is recommended that a small committee be formed to accomplish this task. It is important to have representatives from various interests, but it is also important to keep that committee relatively small. The principal, counselor, a career education teacher, regular education teacher, parent and student are recommended. It is also recommended that initially you start small with only one or two goals. Once you have your program up and running effectively, you can increase the Advisor/Advisee goals and curriculum to include a wider variety of topics. If you try to do too many things in the beginning, the success of your program will be at risk. Once this committee meets and your goals are established it is time to begin the planning process.

PLANNING PROCESS

It is recommended that a team be established for planning implementation of the IGP process. A suggested structure or chain of command is as follows: The principal oversees and monitors the program, with the counselor actually running the program. A teacher/leader should be established for each grade level to provide direction to the Advisor/Advisee program.

The counselor, along with the leaders, will establish what needs to be covered at each individual grade level in order to fulfill the overall goals of the program. The Department of Education has published a guide with lists of topics that can be covered at the different grade levels. For example, at grade 9 topics may include goal setting, note/test taking skills, and personal/work values. For grade 10, topics include world of work trends, relationships, and communication skills. At grade 11, recommended topics include problem solving, résumés, peer pressure, and buying and maintaining a car. Grade 12 includes topics such as tax forms, college applications, financial aid and apartment leasing. For a comprehensive list, as well as an additional wealth of information about IGPs and Advisor/Advisee Programs, you can refer to the guide entitled *IGP: Individual Graduation Plan and Advisory Program*. This publication is available on the Kentucky Department of Education web page www.education.ky.gov under Individual Graduation Plan in the KDE Bookstore and is commonly referred to as the "Lighthouse Book".

It is also recommended that the grade-level leader not serve as a student advisor, but instead be available to observe and assist advisors during the advising sessions. Since the leaders will be responsible for completing lessons plans and preparing necessary advisory materials, the load on the advisor should be relatively light.

The selection of the grade-level leaders is an important decision. Select those who are supportive of an Advisor/Advisee program and are upbeat and good motivators. These people are key to the success of your program, so choose carefully.

Again, I want to stress that the topics you select may be different than the school next door, and that is okay.

Topics needing to be covered in the planning process are as follows:

- A name for your Advisor/Advisee program; for example, we call ours CATS (Career and Academic Transition Strategies)
- A schedule for the Advisor/Advisee meetings
 - Number of times you plan to meet each year (keep it manageable in the beginning)
 - How long each Advisor/Advisee meeting will last

- Orientation and training for advisors
 - It is extremely important that your advisors be well prepared to lead sessions as well as understand the importance of the lessons they are to present. Plan an orientation to share the program with them; explain the law that applies to the IGP and the many other benefits the Advisor/Advisee program can offer students. Assure them that the workload on their part will be minimal. Advisors will also need to receive training in the content you expect them to relay to students. Having advisors who understand and believe in what they are doing is essential. The more they know, the more comfortable they will feel and the more positive they will be about the program. It is important to note that, regardless of the fabulous job that you do, there may be those who only semi-cooperate. Hopefully, with the principal's and the grade-level leaders' presence from time to time, sessions will be productive.
- General content to be addressed at each grade level
 - Each grade level leader along with the counselor should determine specific content. The counselor, who will be working with all groups, will be able to see the big picture.
- Long Range Plans
 - Determine if you want students to stay with their original group throughout your program (e.g. 4 years)
 - Determine if the group will keep the same advisor throughout the program

IMPLEMENTATION

Grade-level leaders will assume the most responsibility in the implementation of the program. Because of this added responsibility some schools pay each leader a stipend. Below are recommended responsibilities of the leader:

- Meet with the counselor to design curriculum.
- Create lesson plans that are scripted and specific. They should tell the advisor what to say and do during the lesson. This assures that each individual receives the intended instruction and reduces stress for the teacher. It also allows for the use of a substitute teacher when necessary.
- Make copies needed for Advisor/Advisee session.
- Meet with advisors to explain and discuss lesson plans/content within the lesson.
- Solicit feedback from advisors in order to meet advisor/student needs and improve lessons. Monitor sessions by visiting each advisor group each time they meet.
- Assist advisors during sessions when needed. Clarify concepts, answer questions, make additional copies and act as substitute when necessary. (The counselor may also assume this role, in addition to the group leader).

Again, it is very important to provide easy-to-follow scripted lesson plans and any materials needed at least one week prior to each session. If advisors do not feel too great a burden, then hopefully they will be more accepting of their duties.

FOLLOW UP

As with any program, it is important to collect feedback on a periodic basis from a variety of sources. Students, parents and advisors need to be given the opportunity to let you know what they feel works and what does not work. This feedback is a valuable tool for the leader to use for improvement. By allowing the advisors and students to give their opinions and suggestions, they begin to see the Advisor/Advisee program as "their program". Over time, this gives those involved ownership and builds a more supportive and positive attitude for the program.

The Advisor/Advisee program, when designed around the needs of the school and students, will be meaningful to all who are involved and the program will become an integral part of your students' education.

Integration of the IGP into a Class or Homeroom

Some schools prefer to integrate the IGP process into an existing class or homeroom. One method for incorporating the IGP into a pre-existing structure is to include a program in a class or homeroom that all students must already take as part of their graduation requirement. The same steps necessary for an Advisor/Advisee program would apply to this method. Specific goals, structure, and organization of personnel and curriculum development would need to be determined. Training and follow-up for the program are also necessary components to a successful program. Please refer to the steps covered in the Advisor/Advisee section of this document. An integrated approach has both good and bad points. The good is that the pre-existing structure is only minimally altered. The negative of this approach, from my viewpoint, is the added burden to the content area of the selected class. Time once allocated to cover the core content of that class is now reduced in order to allow for completion of the IGP.

Creation of a Career Course as a Graduation Requirement

Some schools, in order to accommodate IGPs and allow for ample opportunity to complete them, have incorporated various courses and other activities into their graduation requirements. During the course, which students take each year of high school, they work on the elements of the IGP. These courses generally meet daily for a short period of time, and at the end of the school year the student will earn a portion of a credit. In most cases they will receive $\frac{1}{4}$ credit per year. In addition to the IGP work, other topics may be covered that will help achieve other goals established by the school. I feel this is a good approach for completing the IGP and allows for ongoing investigation and revisions. Again, I

urge anyone attempting to set up a new program to follow the Advisee portion of this paper.

If you select the career course as your vehicle for the IGP, remember to take into consideration how to work with transfer students. More than likely, you will need to write an exception into your graduation requirements.

Transitions and the IGP

It has always been a goal of mine to take the meaningfulness of the IGP beyond high school. The purpose of the IGP, if you recall, is to allow students to plan and prepare for post-secondary endeavors. But the IGP itself often becomes a collection of more information than can be managed and utilized. More often than not, when seniors are handed their IGP folders, more than half end up never looking at it again. It was with this knowledge that I became determined to have seniors produce something from the IGP that would be meaningful and useful, both in high school and after. Our solution to this was a very simple one, but one that I have seen seniors and graduates use again and again. During the senior year, our seniors are required to produce a Career Portfolio that pulls the contents of their IGP folders into a few meaningful documents. Seniors are required to have the following documents:

- Résumé (either academic or work)
- One letter of recommendation
- One letter of application
- Transcript (I supply a final transcript at the end of the year)

During the course of our senior advisor/advisee program, students receive instructions for completing the portfolio requirements. In many cases it is only a matter of revising documents already in the IGP folder (e.g., résumés). The completion of the Career Portfolio is part of our graduation requirements, which assures that each graduating senior will complete one. As a gift to the seniors, we provide each one with a nice leather-like portfolio that contains sleeves for their documents and a sleeve for diskette and compact disks. They are encouraged to keep their documents on diskettes or CDs for easy revisions and updates.

It is our hope that, through the process of completing the IGP, students learn far more than what they want to do after high school. Self-exploration, researching, and goal setting are valuable tools gained through the development of an Individual Graduation Plan. A familiar quote, which appears on our faculty lounge door, is "The object of teaching a child is to enable that child to get along without the teacher". Completing the IGP folder teaches the student a valuable process that will be used again and again throughout life as change is encountered. Regardless of the method selected to use with students for

completing the IGP requirement, the underlying principle is that of teaching the individual to independently set career goals and achieve them.

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